

TANGENTS

BY IHTISHAM KABIR



Ocean and mountain, Husavik.

PHOTO: IHTISHAM KABIR.

In Iceland

I visited Iceland last month. I had been there once before in 1986. It was not on the tourist map then, but its sheer beauty had left me with a desire to return.

The island nation has only 323,000 people living in its 40,000 square miles. Best known for its stark, volcanic landscape including geysers, waterfalls, geothermal springs, glaciers and, of course, volcanoes, it is also the most peaceful country in the world.

Iceland was settled by Norse settlers about one thousand years ago. Its parliament (Althing) is one of the oldest in the world, dating from 972 A.D. After several centuries of various forms of colonialism, Iceland attained full independence from Denmark in 1944. The Icelandic language boasts a Nobel prize winner in literature (Halldor Laxness.) Just about everyone speaks English well. The nation loves books and a discussion with my friend in publishing revealed that Plato translated into the Icelandic is very popular.

Surrounded by the north Atlantic's bountiful waters, Iceland counts fisheries as its main resource. After an economic collapse in 2008, its currency devalued. This made the country cheaper for tourists who now arrive in droves to see its natural beauty. Tourism is thus Iceland's second largest income source.

A ring road circumnavigates this island. Many tourists opt for a weeklong drive around it after landing in Reykjavik. However, my destination was Lake Myvatn: I wanted to photograph the lake's famed water birds. After reaching Reykjavik from London I took a domestic flight to Akureyri on the north east. From there I rented a car and drove two hours to Myvatn.

The drive took me through some outstanding scenery. Later, when I mentioned to my friend about the

deep, pulsating blue of the Icelandic sky and ocean, he remarked, "many people say that." As I drove with the ocean on one side and mountains on the other, the weather changed rapidly, going from cloudy to rains to sunny, sometimes in a matter of minutes, creating ever-changing vistas.

An unusual feature of Icelandic landscape is the lack of trees. The island once had old-growth birch forests, but the settlers cleared them to make room for farms. Today there are smaller groves of birch and aspen, but there is a distinctive lunar look to the landscape.

Myvatn turned out to be a sprawling lake with many types of beautiful ducks. The smaller, red-breasted phalarope was a bonus. It kept on rotating 360 degrees on the water looking for food and allowed me up close. I saw whales off the port of Husavik (covered in an earlier column.) Icelandic horses were common. They are special because compared to other horses they have two extra gaits.

I flew back to Reykjavik, one of the smallest capitals of the world. It attained fame as the site of the Spassky-Fischer chess games at the height of the Cold War (Fischer is buried in Reykjavik.) The city centre is graced by a beautiful lake while colourful rooftops can be seen on the horizon. There are very few high-rises. Interesting architecture includes Harpa, the concert hall designed by Olafur Eliasson, which modulates with rhythmic lighting at night. A street side stand sold delicious hot dogs - garnished with crunchy fried onions - which Bill Clinton had enjoyed.

Much too soon, it was time to take my leave of this amazing land and its friendly people. I hope to return someday.

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RU BCL men beat up cultural activist

Victim didn't wake up in 3hrs; maybe suffered 'brain injury'

RU CORRESPONDENT

A group of Bangladesh Chhatra League activists of Rajshahi University yesterday beat up a cultural activist only 16 days after the attack on former president of RU Kendrio Sangskritik Jote Basudev Roy, who is still recovering in hospital.

Porag Saklaine, a third-year student of economics and activist of cultural organisation "S", was admitted to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital (RMCH) unconscious and with head injuries.

He did not regain consciousness in about three hours till 8:10pm, Dr Lutfor Rahaman, duty doctor of RMCH, told The Daily Star. The doctor said he might have suffered a severe brain haemorrhage.

Witnesses said four to five BCL men led by activist Shariful Haque Piyas severely beat up Porag with sticks behind Kazi Nazrul Islam Auditorium after calling him in from a meeting of "Icche", a voluntary organisation, at 5:30pm.

At one stage, he ran into RU Central Students Union

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Anti-liberation forces destructive for dev

Speakers tell discussion on Jahanara Imam's death anniversary; want March 25 as 'Mass Killing Day'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

War crimes trial campaigners yesterday urged the government to take necessary steps to observe March 25 as "Mass Killing Day" both locally and globally to commemorate the deaths of millions of people throughout the world including Bangladesh.

They also cautioned the government against complacency about economic growth till elimination of the anti-liberation elements because "they are destructive for development".

They were addressing a discussion on the "21st Death Anniversary of Shaheed Janani



Jahanara Imam" in the capital's WVA Auditorium, organised by Ekattorer Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee.

The platform also hosted Jahanara Imam Memorial Speech and distributed Jahanara Imam Medal.

Cultural organisation Chhayanaut and Ajay Roy, professor of physics at Dhaka University and father of slain blogger Avijit Roy, received the medal for contributing to the promotion of secularism.

Delivering the memorial speech on "Cultural Movement of Bangladesh

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As rivers and canals swell during the monsoon, the necessity of boats is felt ever more in riparian Bangladesh. So making boats has not only been an artistic pursuit but also a source of making money. At Atghara Haat, situated at the border of Jhalkathi and Pirojpur districts, professional boat-makers put their creations up for sale every Friday throughout the four months of rainy season. Each boat sells for Tk 2,000 to Tk 5,000. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: BANGLAR CHOKH

Road crashes kill 4

CITY DESK

Four people were killed and six others injured in road accidents in four districts yesterday and Thursday.

Our Munshiganj correspondent reports, an unidentified woman died as a bus ran her over on Dhaka-Chittagong highway in Baushia of Gazaria upazila yesterday.

Our Bogra correspondent reports, pickup driver Akhilur Rahman, 25, of Gaibandha, was killed and his helper injured after a truck and his vehicle collided head-on in Pakurtola of Shibganj upazila yesterday, said police.

Our Noakhali correspondent reports, Refat, 8, son of Md Babul Mia, died as a covered van ran him over on Chaumuhani-Laxmipur road at Begumganj's Afaniabazar yesterday.

Agitating locals detained the vehicle and blocked the road for an hour.

Our Thakurgaon correspondent adds, a tractor collided head-on with a battery-run auto-rickshaw killing its passenger Hazrat Ali, 35, and injuring five others on Thakurgaon-Gorea road at Bagherhat village in Sadar upazila on Thursday.

The injured were taken to Thakurgaon Sadar Hospital.

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